Frontline Supervisors Training

Assisting Personnel in Distress

Course Agenda

- Introduction
- Preparation
- Recognizing Distress
- Engaging Distressed Individuals
- Referring Personnel For Help
- Following Up
- Conclusion

Introduction

Good Leadership is Good Prevention

- ***Be Great Wingmen!***
  - Take care of yourself
  - Take care of those around you
- ***Culture of Responsible Choices:***
  - Airmen take care of Airmen by making responsible decisions that keep themselves and each other safe and healthy

Purpose

- Provide in-depth training for frontline supervisors to enhance your ability to recognize and effectively intervene with personnel suffering from emotional distress secondary to a variety of life problems

- Build upon the skills first learned during annual suicide prevention training and various PME activities

Military is a Demanding Profession

- Today's military is very much about coping with high demands
  - High standards of personal conduct expected
  - Move frequently, often far from home of origin
  - Deploy around world to austere & hostile locations
  - Long work hours to complete mission
- Puts pressure on our Airmen and their families
  - Common for personnel to feel overwhelmed or stretched too thin

Supervisors

- Are often busy and overworked
- Are responsible for managing multiple mission-related and administrative tasks
- Have units that are often understaffed
- Have personnel that are often young and inexperienced
- Frequently deal with time consuming personnel problems

Rewards of Military Life

- Despite these pressures, military life can be highly rewarding
  - Pride in serving country
  - Professional accomplishment
  - Travel around country & world
  - Unit camaraderie
  - Sense of base community
  - Team spirit

Why the frontline supervisor?

- You're the first line of defense in assisting personnel who are in distress
  - You spend time every day at work with your personnel
  - You're familiar with their typical behavior
  - You may be the first to see problems develop
- Being proactive by fostering unit morale and stress management will help you to protect your personnel
  - Distress negatively impacts job performance and lowers readiness

Discussion

- What are some of the pressures you see facing the members of today's military?
- How about the pressures facing supervisors?

Exercise #1

PRESS Approach to Aiding Personnel in Distress

- **P**repare
  - Connect with your people
- **R**ecognize
  - Identify personnel in distress
- **E**ngage
  - Intervene with distressed personnel
- **S**end
  - Refer personnel to appropriate helping agency
- **S**ustain
  - Follow-up regularly until problem resolved

Prepare

Connect with Your People

Trust

- “Nobody cares how much you know until they know how much you care”

- Your Airmen need to know you and trust you before you can be in a position to help them during times of crisis
  - You can’t help them if you don’t know their problems
  - They won’t trust you with their problems if you don’t take the time to get to know them

Know Your People

- It is part of our job as supervisors to talk to our people about their lives every day

- Easier to recognize distress if you know how someone acts when things are normal

Build Good Working Relationships

- Leaders who focus solely on the mission can neglect interpersonal factors critical to unit morale
- Need to balance building relationships against getting tasks accomplished – both are necessary
- Cohesive units with strong morale perform better under both routine and duress conditions

Avoid the Disconnect

- Walk around the duty section every day
  - Check to see how things are going at work, at home, and personally
  - Interact with your personnel to convey interest and concern for their welfare
  - Spend time listening to their concerns
  - Cultivate your ability to listen attentively
  - Handle situations fairly and avoid showing favoritism

Avoid the Disconnect

- Make them feel comfortable about coming to you
  - Create an atmosphere of trust
  - Create a climate that fosters communication
- Send the message that:
  - Their personal well-being is important to you
  - You are interested in hearing about their problems
  - You will support them in finding solutions
  - You believe seeking help for distress shows strength, responsibility, maturity, good judgment
  - They are a valued and vital part of the unit

Supervisor Actions

- Good leadership helps personnel in distress
  - Don’t forget leadership skills taught in PME
- Make good use of performance feedback sessions
- Find a mentor
- Periodically assess your supervisory skills and actions
- Examine organizational climate
  - Look for leadership actions that alleviate job stress
- Be comfortable asking tough questions
  - Practice builds experience and comfort level

Supervisor Actions

- Publicly encourage help seeking behavior
  - When you first join unit and periodically thereafter
  - Set tone that asking for help is OK
- Support attendance at prevention or treatment programs
  - Allow flexible work schedules when possible
- Encourage healthy lifestyle choices
- Role model healthy self care and good work ethic
  - Your Airmen are watching your behavior

Supervisor Actions

- Use the Buddy System
  - Emphasize the value of healthy relationships
  - Foster an environment of healthy self care and strong peer support
  - Encourage development of peer support networks
- Apply the Wingman Concept
  - Supporting each other enhances the mission
  - People of integrity care about each other's well-being

Discussion

- How well do you think you know your people? How can you check?
- How do you ask about home life or personal issues?
- Sometimes the best time to get this kind of information is at those informal moments of the day, like hanging around at breaks or lunch

Exercise #2

Recognize

Identifying Personnel in Distress

Sources of Distress

- Deployments
- Work
- School
- Legal issues
- Finances
- Health concerns
- Relationships
- Family
- Traumatic events
- Unrealistic expectations

Signs of Distress

- Belief there is no solution or no way out
- Feelings of hopelessness
- Anxiety (nervousness)
- Agitation
- Anger, irritability, and arguments
- Isolation and withdrawal
- Depression
- Low self-esteem
- Constant fatigue
- Trouble concentrating
- Change in appetite or weight
- Insomnia
- Excessive sleeping
- Upset stomach
- Frequent headaches
- Loss of interest in work or normal activities
- Talking about death
- Suicidal ideation
- Neglecting responsibilities

Consequences of Distress

- Decreased efficiency and productivity
- Absenteeism
- Lateness for work
- Missed deadlines
- Faulty decisions
- Increased mistakes
- More accidents
- Increased conflict
- Lower morale

Factors that Protect Against Distress

- Optimism about your future
- Strong social support from family, friends, and co-workers
- Belief that your life has purpose and meaning
- Feeling that you belong to a group
- Willingness to seek help
- Willingness to talk about problems
- Effective coping and problem solving skills
- Cultural norms that encourage people to seek help

Look For:

- Unusual or sudden changes in:
  - Behavior
  - Appearance
  - Hygiene
  - Demeanor
  - Emotions
  - Performance
  - Relationships

When to be concerned?

- Severe, prolonged, or unmanageable stress
- Difficulty coping or functioning
- Lack of social support
- Escalating alcohol or drug use
- Feelings worthlessness, hopelessness, or depression
- History of prior suicide attempts

Exercise #3

Engage

Intervening with Distressed Personnel

Engaging Personnel in Distress

- Don’t be afraid to ask
  - Give yourself permission to act (intervene)
  - Make time to do it, even though you’re busy
- Listen first
  - Encourage sharing
- Acknowledge distress
- Discuss needs
- Make a plan

Engaging Personnel in Distress

- People in distress can focus on the negative and lose sight of positive things in their lives
  - Reacquaint them with “plus” side of their ledger
  - Emphasize hope as an option
- Pay attention to both responsible Airmen and Airmen in trouble - both suffer distress
  - Those with disciplinary issues may suffer the greatest distress and be most at risk

Recognize & Respect Diversity

- Culture
- Race
- Ethnicity
- Nation
- Religion
- Gender
- Age
- Education
- Branch of Service
- Career Field

Supervisor Actions

- Be tactful & professional at all times
  - True leaders maintain composure and dignity
- Address concerns directly: Be frank and honest
  - Avoid euphemisms or talking around the subject
- Express caring and hope
  - Compassion isn’t weakness or lack of resolve
  - Supervisor can be both firm and compassionate
- Monitor your emotions
  - Angry words or decisions aren’t always best
- Your values are not necessarily their values
  - What’s best for you isn’t always best for them

How do I talk to someone in distress?

- *I've noticed you're feeling upset*
- *What's going on in your life?*
- *Are you thinking about suicide?*
- *What do you think might help?*
- *Where would you like to seek help?*
- *Why don't we make the call together?*
- *I'm not going to feel comfortable without being sure you're going to get some help.*

Discussion

- How do you listen well?
- How do you broach sensitive subjects?
- How do you deliver bad news?
- How do you offer corrective feedback?
- How do you deal with someone you don’t like, or someone who is difficult to be around?
- What do you do with someone who refuses to listen, to change, or to get help?
- How do you offer hope when someone is in serious trouble?

Exercise #4

Send

Refer Personnel to the Appropriate Helping Agency

Referring

- When to refer?
  - Think help early
  - Refer before situation has chance to deteriorate
  - Behavior won't improve without dealing with underlying problem
- Where to refer?
  - Depends on nature of problem and his/her preferences
  - Help personnel choose where to go for help
  - Make yourself familiar with base resources
- How to refer?
  - Contact agency and ask for guidance
  - Make the call with the Airman

Where to go for help:

- Family, friends, supervisors, first sergeants, and commanders
- Mental Health Clinic
- Family Advocacy Program
- Substance Abuse Clinic
- Chaplains
- Airman and Family Readiness Center
- Health and Wellness Center
- Military OneSource

How to Get Urgent Help

- Take the person to the emergency room or the Mental Health Clinic
- Notify your supervisor or call 911 for help, if necessary
- Involve security, if necessary
- Do not leave the person alone
- Remove lethal means of self harm
  - Firearms, pills, car keys, etc.

Mental Health Services

- Mental health providers can treat emotional and behavioral problems that impact well-being and duty performance
- For most Airmen who seek mental health care, their privacy is maintained and their career is unharmed
  - 97% of Airmen who seek treatment at Air Force Mental Health Clinics suffer no negative career impact
  - For 90% of Airmen who seek mental health care, no one from the unit is ever contacted
  - When commanders are contacted, they're generally given only fitness for duty and safety information
- Remember – by law, only the commander can order an Airman to undergo a mental health evaluation

Sustain

Follow-up Regularly Until Problem is Resolved

Following Up

- Vitally important for supervisor to maintain frequent contact with the Airman until situation resolved
  - Sustain your commitment and stay involved
  - Ask periodically about how things are going
  - Check to see if the Airman needs anything
  - Protect private personal information
  - Make effective use of encouragement and affirmation
  - Help the Airman feel accepted and welcome after return from treatment
  - Serious negative consequences can result from failure to follow through

Other Issues to Consider

- Always keep your chain informed
- Recognize your limits – there is only so much you can and should do
- Establish boundaries as supervisor or you will get burned out
  - You cannot be all things to all people
  - You need to have your own life, too

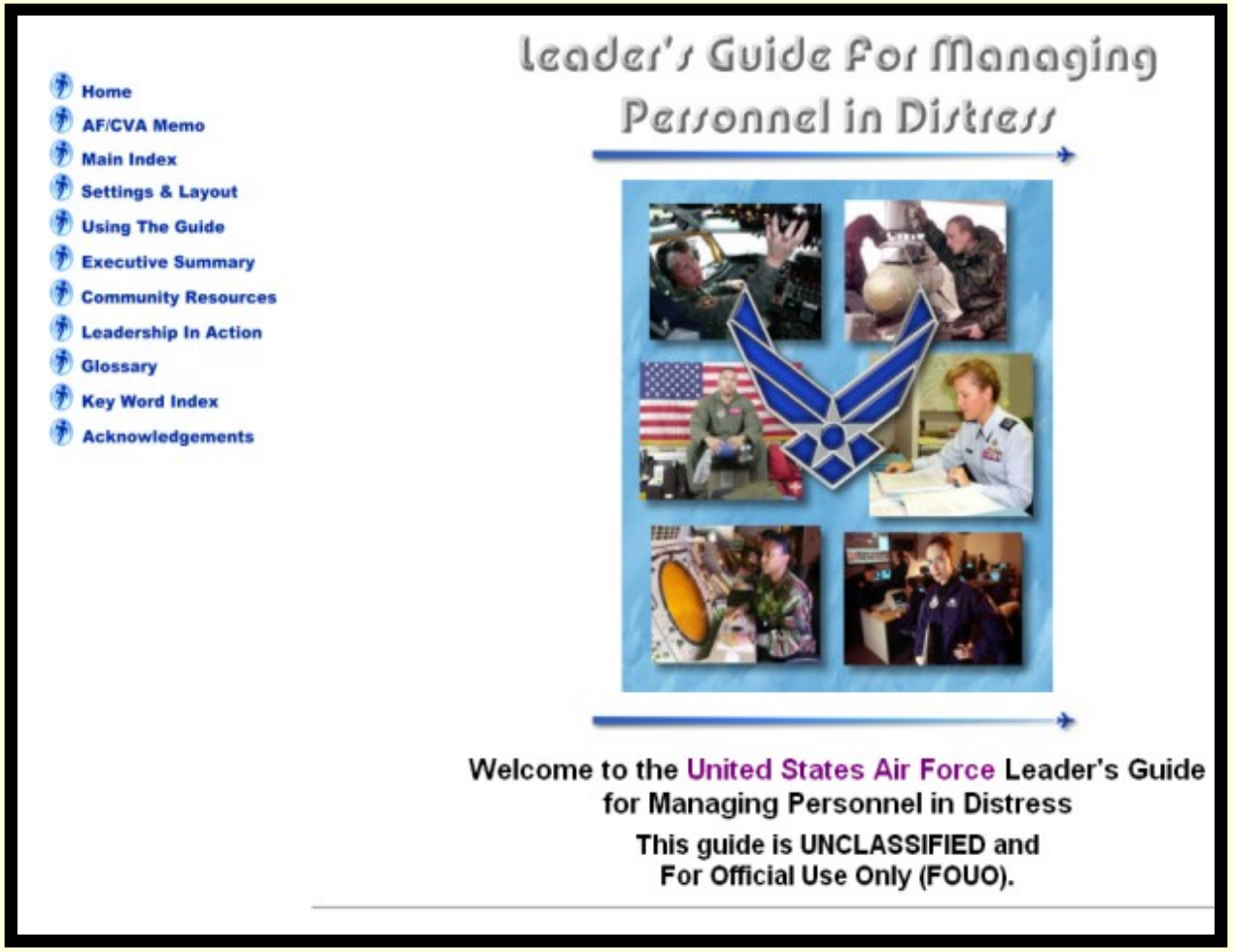
Coping with Bad Outcomes

- Even with the best decisions and actions, tragic events will occur
  - Some individuals are successful at hiding their difficulties until it is too late
  - Some individuals will take their lives even when given the best help available
- Recognize that you can take reasonable steps to help prevent many bad outcomes, but you can’t prevent all of them

Managing Stress

- ***S*** = Sleep – Get plenty of rest
- ***T*** = Take time off – Leave, vacation, etc.
- ***R*** = Relaxation & recreation – Have fun
- ***A*** = Activity – Exercise regularly
- ***I*** = Inform – Talk to someone
- ***N*** = Nourishment – Eat healthily

Supervisor's Toolkit



Exercise #5

Conclusion

Supervisor's Role in Troop Health

- Good leadership skills helps personnel in distress
- Maintain a supportive work environment
- Know the people you work with
- Know the warning signs
- Ask the tough questions (i.e., about life problems, distress, suicidal ideation, alcohol use, etc.)
- Encourage help seeking behaviors
- Refer early
- Keep in touch until problem resolved
- Recognize when help is needed and get it

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